

Iowa CASA Advocate In-Service Training

Participant Guide

Iowa Child
Advocacy Board

Investigation/Gathering
Information Toolkit

Understanding the Scope &
Purpose of the CASA
Advocate Role



Introduction



The children we advocate for are victims of child abuse and neglect, and many of them are in relative placement or foster care. They need a “voice in court” in order to ensure they have a safe, permanent home quickly - whether that means returning to a parent or being adopted.

As an Advocate, one of your roles is to provide that voice, sharing with the court both the child’s wishes and your recommendations about what is in the child’s best interest. It is important work that requires the commitment of your time, your energy, and your heart.

This training toolkit will provide you the opportunity to build upon what you discovered through Pre-Service Training. You will contemplate the case specific information and issues you will need to investigate to effectively advocate for the best interests of the child(ren) you have been appointed to serve. Having a complete understanding of this will prepare you to share in your report the gathered information and your perspectives on the strengths and concerns of the case that impact your recommendations. This is how you effectively become the child’s “voice in court”.



This training can be further built upon by taking the *Report Writing Training* before you begin drafting your first report to the court. You will use the information you have gained in your Investigation Toolkit and incorporate that information into an objective and thorough CASA Report. All resources referenced can be found on the ICAB website under Forms and Resources.

Importance of Gathering Information Effectively

The CASA court report is one of the most essential aspects of your work as an Advocate. It is the tool used to effectively communicate the child's perspective. It will also provide information on the progress the parents are making and provides objective strengths, concerns and recommendations for what you perceive as being in the child's best interest.

The validity and credibility of your report is based on your efforts of gathering valuable information between court hearings. Your

objective involvement is reflected in your court report. This is demonstrated by your actions of consistently making contacts with the parties in the case. In addition, the breadth of information you gather, or lack thereof, can influence others' perceptions of your unbiased concerns and recommendations.



Contact should be made with all relevant parties. This demonstrates that you are being objective, by considering all facts and information from a “big picture lens”, about what is in the child(ren)’s best interest and you have not made presumptions.

The state is providing reasonable efforts to the parent from whom the child was removed. However, if the other non-custodial parent is available, it is important to show objectivity to also gather information regarding the non-custodial parent.

If you do not gather information from particular parties, such as a parent, or do not address all the case issues, then it may appear that you did not uphold the Role and Responsibilities of the CASA Advocate. This could diminish others' perceptions of the importance of the information that is included in the report.

The facts stated throughout the report are the foundation of the CASA Advocate's recommendations. The facts included need to be free from assumptions and biases. This allows others to more readily understand the

stated strengths, concerns, and recommendations. The Judge will draw conclusions and determine the court expectations.



Judges rely on the information in CASA court reports as they make their decisions. The CASA court report provides a way to systematically organize pertinent information you have gathered and gives the court a clear mental image of the child's situation. The Judge must use objective information to rule in the best interest of the child. Your hard work results in the court report. Putting time into the planning and investigation prior to writing the CASA report elevates the quality of information gathered and the CASA recommendations.



Learning Outcomes for Section One:

- Identify sources of information for various case issues.
- Develop a plan of investigation (Advocate Case Action Plan) regarding relevant history, environment, professionals, parents, and the needs of child(ren).
- Identify possible questions to ask of parties connected to their case.
- Outline the initial steps of their specific case investigation.

Section One: Investigating and Gathering Information

First Step: *Case File Review*

During Pre-Service Training you learned about the various documents included in a case file. Different types of information can be gleaned from various documents. While it is important to read the complete file, as an overview we can review the CINA Petition, the Child Protective Services Assessment, and the DHS Social Report for needed facts. Depending on what stage of the court process the case is in, there may be additional Court Orders, a Case Permanency Plan, FSRP (Family, Safety, Risk and Permanency) Reports, therapists or other providers' reports, drug screens, and Family Team Meeting notes. You can refer to Module 2 of your Pre-Service Training for a more detailed explanation of these documents.



These documents give you an initial overview of the case and what issues led the family to become involved with the Department of Human Services. You will learn the legal justification via the Iowa Code for the court to have oversight of the goals and planning for permanency, case expectations, and determining reasonable efforts and the placement of the child.

Remember, some families can receive DHS services and not be involved in the court process. However, Court is always involved if the State has determined that they need to remove a child from their home.

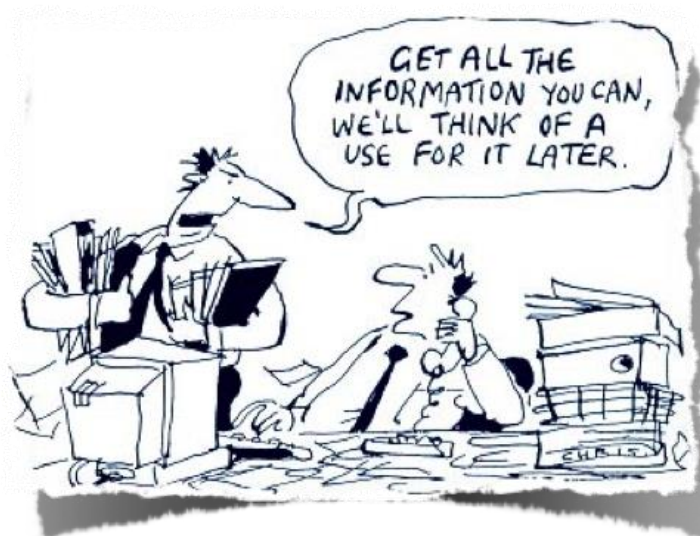
Investigation and Gathering Information

Next Step: *Develop Your Case Summary and your Advocate Case Action Plan*

As you review the court file, you will begin to record the various parties and any contact information you can gather from the file, e.g. specific providers' names, organizations they are connected with, phone numbers and email addresses. The *Case Summary Sheet* helps organize this information and the parties to the case. This document is provided to you at case assignment. You will use this information so you can have the parents sign a Release of Information as needed.

You will also be provided a template of the *Advocate Case Action Plan* to begin to outline for yourself the DHS and Court concerns and expectations. These are the issues which are being evaluated by the Judge at each subsequent hearing. You will add your own concerns and issues that need further exploration. This outline will help guide you in your advocate planning for what additional information you need to gather, the types of questions you will need to ask, and the parties you will contact to obtain the needed information.

Just like when writing a research paper, the more thorough your preparation in outlining the issues and factual information and your case questions, the more useful additional information you will gather to then have available to share with the judge.



The totality of the information gathered between court hearings needs to be maintained. Not all information may rise to the importance of including it into a submitted CASA report but is helpful to include in your monthly summary to inform your Coach/Coordinator.

As you begin completing *the Advocate Case Action Plan* use the Petition to understand why the court is involved.

**Code of Iowa Juvenile Court Chapter 232.2
CINA Statutory Definitions**

6 (A)	Abandonment
6 (B)	Physical Abuse/Neglect
6 (C)	Harmful Effect as a Result of:
(1)	(1) Mental Injury
(2)	(2) Failure to Exercise Reasonable Degree of Care
(3)	(3) Knowingly disseminated or exhibited obscene material to the child
6 (D)	Sexual Abuse
6 (E)	Medical Treatment Needed
6 (F)	Treatment Needed for Mental Issues
6 (G)	Not Providing Food, Clothing, Shelter, etc.
6 (H)	Delinquent Act at Parent's Request
6 (I)	Child Pornography
6 (J)	Without Parent or Guardian
6 (K)	Good Cause – Parent desires relieved from care/custody
6 (L)	Good Cause – Child desires parents relieved from custody
6 (M)	Chemical Dependency (Child)
6 (N)	Parent's Mental Capacity, Imprisonment, Chemical Dependency
6 (O)	Drug Exposed Child
6 (P)	Unlawfully Manufactures a Dangerous Substance in the Presence of Child or possesses products to produce in presence of child.
6(Q)	Who is a Newborn Infant whose Parent has Voluntarily Released Custody of the Child per Chapter 233

If there is a Case Permanency Plan available, read it thoroughly to discern the life domain concerns that are addressed and the goals outlined. This will assist you in understanding the recommendations for services and the plan for permanency. It can help you monitor progress or barriers to successfully meeting the goals at subsequent hearings.

How to initially complete your Advocate Case Action Plan:

➡ Fill out life domains on your Advocate Case Action Plan using information in the Case Permanency Plan. *Resource 1.*

➡ Check only the boxes in each section on your Action Plan that correlate to the boxes checked on the Case Permanency Plan (CPP). Do this for every life domain.

➡ For each checked box write a sentence or two to identify the specific need/issue being presented.

➡ Identify questions you have about that need and the goals which are outlined in the CPP. *Optional: Use the Sample Questions Handout tool first shared in your Pre-Service Training Binder to springboard your questions. Resource 2 and 3.*

➡ Identify whom you can interview to obtain the answers to your questions. *Optional: Use any Pre-Service Training Handouts as your tools to explore potential sources of information. Resource 4 and 5.*



Now that you have initially outlined your plan and immediate questions, you will begin to schedule your contacts for in-person and telephone meetings.



Investigation and Gathering Information

Implement your Initial Action Plan

Initial contacts with interested parties are more introductory and fact-finding in nature. Ongoing monthly contacts will also be critical so that you can gather additional information to have a big picture for determining the child's best interests.

1. Contact DHS Case Manager

You will discuss the case to obtain their updates since the CASA was assigned, share information you have learned, and ask questions.



- Determine what questions you might ask that you were not able to find within the documents in the case file.
- Ask for their email address if not known, and what their preferred method of contact will be: phone or email. Inquire on their texting ability and preferences.
- If the Caseworker is unfamiliar with the CASA role, you can provide the *CASA and You* Information Sheet. **Resource 7.**
- Suggested information to gather if not already known includes:
 - Where is the child placed? Name, address, and phone numbers.
 - Who are the therapists and FSRP worker, including names, phone numbers and email addresses?
 - Where is the child going to school? Name and location. What information have they gleaned from the child's teacher?
 - What is the visitation situation, including where, frequency, length?
 - Inquire who the Family Team Meeting Coordinator is and obtain their contact information, if that is not known. Is there a FTM currently scheduled – when and where?
 - What other documents do they have that have not yet been filed with the court? E.g. UA results, psychological and treatment reports regarding the parents, etc.

2. Contact Parents' Attorneys

This is your chance to tell the parent's attorney that you will be contacting and meeting with the parents. Most parents' attorneys will agree that you can meet with their clients, but if they want to be present during your interview with the parents, you must allow it. You do not need to contact the parent's attorney after the initial contact.

- If you speak with the attorney, ask them if there is anything that as the child's CASA Advocate, you should know about their client.
- If you meet the attorney in person, you can provide the *Parent Information Sheet* if the Coordinator has not already provided that to the attorney. *Resource 6.*
- Ask them if there are any known barriers to their client being successful in meeting the expectations and CPP goals.

If you know information that you think the parent's attorney should also know, you can relay that through DHS or have the parent sign a CASA Release of Information so we can share information with the attorney.

BEST PRACTICE

This is best practice as we would not want a court hearing delayed because a parent's attorney states that they cannot "zealously advocate" for their client with the last minute information. The result of that would be a continued hearing which only delays decision making for a child with a different sense of time than the adults in charge.

3. Contact Child's Attorney/Guardian ad Litem (GAL)

It is a courtesy to call the child's attorney/GAL; you do not need to call them before you see the child.

- Ask them for their ideas on what are the case strengths and barriers.
- Obtain contact information and inquire which communication method they prefer for ongoing contact. If email is preferred, remember to always copy in the Coach and Coordinator.
- If the child's attorney/GAL is unfamiliar with the CASA role, you can provide the *CASA and You* Information Sheet. *Resource 7.*

BEST PRACTICE

- It is permissible and typically desirable to contact the children's attorney/GAL as needed to update them on how the children are doing between hearings.
- Often the GAL can be a strong ally in court for the CASA and provide support to the CASA's position. Working collaboratively with the GAL begins by building a positive relationship with the attorney from the beginning of the CASA's appointment.

While CASA and GALs are appointed with the same goal of the child's best interests, there may be times when opinions differ. It is important to respect other's opinions, remain open-minded, and always act professionally with the goal of cooperation. If something arises during the course of the case that the GAL has a concern related to the Advocate, and the GAL wants to be present during the Advocate's visit with the child, this may be accommodated. A time for your monthly visit that works for everyone would need to be considered. Your Coach or Coordinator will help you if this is an issue, which is very rare in occurrence.



4. Contact the Placement of the Child(ren)

It is important to see the children in many settings, such as their placement, and for you to gather information from the child's primary caretaker.

- If the child/children remain in the parental home, contact the parents and meet the children and parents at the same time.
- If the child(ren) is in foster care or relative placement, determine the location and phone number of the foster/relative home to make arrangements to meet them and the children.
- You may elect to share the *CASA and Foster Parents* Information Sheet if the foster parents are unfamiliar with the CASA role. **Resource 8.**
- If the child is in group care, your Order Appointing CASA will need to be sent by the local office to the facility. This will allow you to visit the child and receive updates from the facility staff.
- Immediate types of information, about the child and how the change in their routine is impacting the child, are important areas as a starting point for future progress comparisons.

Areas to acquire specific information about the child's daily life and about the child's behavior are related to:

- Visits with parents and siblings
- Current DHS approved visitation/contact
- Adjustments in school
- Behavior problems and strengths
- Medical concerns
- Contacts made by parents through letters, phone calls, etc.
- Child's daily functioning
- Adjustment to separation/loss
- Sleeping habits
- Eating habits
- Interactions with other family members
- Caregiver's opinion about how the child is doing
- Concerns or needs for the child that are not being addressed



The CASA Advocate expectations include meeting with the child in person every month. **Discuss with the custodian your plan to meet with the child in subsequent months.**



It is critical to remember what the Code of Iowa mandates regarding confidentiality. You can obtain information from the foster parent, relative, placement, but you cannot provide information. If the caregiver wants and/or needs information they must be directed to contact DHS.

5. Contact the Parent(s)

This is your opportunity to set the stage for your future contacts.

- If at this point you have not met the parents, contact them and make arrangement to meet them.
- As a reminder when visiting with adults with children present, be sure children are not in ear shot if you are discussing adult issues.
- The first visit should only last 30 minutes unless they really want to talk and share detailed information.
- Do not discuss the specific incident of abuse/neglect with the parents,

although you are interested in their belief in why they are involved with the system. You are interested in what they are doing now to get their children back.

- Provide them with your contact information (preferably with your business card the CASA program has provided for you), whether that is your personal phone number or the office number. You may also provide them with the *Parent Information Sheet* if the Coordinator has not already done so. *Resource 5.*

BEST PRACTICE

It is important to explain your role and boundaries, what as a CASA Volunteer you can and cannot do, and to focus the initial visit on any strength that the parent is demonstrating or identifying for themselves or their family functioning thus far in the case.

Some initial information to gather during some of the first few contacts:

- Visitation – How is it going?
- Clarify with the parents what services they are participating in if services have begun such as: evaluations, therapy, substance abuse treatment, FSRP services, UAs, AA meetings, parenting classes and any other service.
- Is the parent participating in any other services other than what DHS has recommended? This can demonstrate a strength of the parent.
- If they have started receiving FSRP services, what new things are they learning?
- Does the parent believe there are any other services needed, but not provided, at this time?
- If the child is not with a relative, do they know any relatives that would be willing to take the child?
- Are there any immediate medical or dental treatment needs for their children that the CASA can advocate to occur as soon as possible? This can demonstrate a strength of the parent if something is known.
- Immediate school performance concerns or upcoming events that others should be aware of?



- When is the last time the parent communicated with the school? Are there upcoming parent-teacher conferences scheduled?
- What services do they believe may be helpful?
- Who does the parent believe is a support person for them? If they say people that DHS has helping them, are there other people they consider a support (such as friends or relatives)?
- Who does the parent believe are important people in the life of their child?
- What is the parent's understanding of why the child is out of the home or why the family is involved with the court? This is a general question and is not intended to inquire about the specific incident.
- What does the parent think they need to change in order to bring their child home or keep them in the home successfully and safely?
- Do they have transportation? Do they have a driver's license?
- Do they have employment? Where? What are their hours?
- Do they have DHS approved childcare? Who/Where/Contact Information

Additional important points of the first meeting:

The first meeting with the parents is a good time to have them sign releases for providers such as Therapists; FSRP workers; or anyone else that is needed to give you information about the parent.

Please gather the contact information from the parent that includes, name, the name of facility, phone number, email address or fax number if known.

If the parent has any criminal charges you would NOT have them explain anything regarding the criminal proceedings. You could become a witness in criminal court.

If they start to talk about their criminal case, politely explain to them that they should not talk to you about the criminal case.



You will want to observe the parents during a visit they have with their child(ren) at some point during the case, but you do not need to do this every month and you do not need to be present for the entire visit. Let the parents know that this will occur at some point so you can provide objective information to the judge about their visits together.

Discuss with the parent your plan to meet with them in subsequent months.

CASA best practice expectations include monthly check in with the parents. This is important to do as the permanency goal is reunification for the first 12 months or until a judge determines otherwise. This can be done by phone or in person.

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6. Contact the child

The first visit with the child/ren should be brief and introductory in nature. Use the first visit as an opportunity to begin to build trust and rapport. Remember that children with trauma histories may have difficulties trusting others which will require time and patience. It is only after the child has developed a trusting relationship with the Advocate that the child will be able to honestly share their thoughts and feelings.

- It is important to share what your role is, that you are a volunteer Advocate that shares information with the judge about what is in their best interests, and can share the child's messages directly to the judge.
- It is important to share that you will meet with them every month and that they can contact you between visits.
- You can share the *A Kid's Guide to CASA* as one optional way to introduce yourself and provide your preferred contact information. *Resource 9.*



- Consider the location of the first meeting to be in a setting where the child feels safe and has a trusted adult nearby.
- The goal of the first meeting is to provide the child with an opportunity to become comfortable with you.
- Remember that the child will likely be visited by a number of new adults (strangers) and this can cause additional stress to the child.
- Watch 2 National CASA Training *videos* *Interviewing Skills-Talking with a 4-yr-old child* AND *Talking with a 10-yr-old child* at the following link:
<http://www.casaforchildren.org/site/c.mtJSJ7MPIsE/b.6367907/k.9102/Communication.htm>

When preparing to meet the child for the first time:

- Assess the developmental age of the child by reviewing the file.
- Make an appointment with the child's current caregiver to meet the child in a place where they feel safe.
- Practice an age appropriate introduction of your role as a CASA Advocate.
- Consider bringing an activity to engage the child.
- Consider other ways you can establish trust and rapport with the child.
- Remember not to ask the child about the abuse allegations.

7. Contact the FSRP worker

The FSRP worker may not have worked with a CASA Advocate previously so it will be important for the Program Coordinator to facilitate their understanding of the CASA role and boundaries if issues arise. The *CASA and You* Information Sheet can be shared at your first meeting. *Resource 7.*

- The FSRP worker needs to be provided with the CASA Appointment Order and the parent's signed release, if needed. This person provides supervision of visits and teaches parenting skills.

- Questions to ask include:
 - How are the visits going?
 - What is the attendance for visits?
 - How often do they meet with the family?
 - What types of things are they working on?
 - Are they seeing progress? In what areas?
 - What are their concerns?



It is not the CASA responsibility to keep the FSRP worker apprised of information happening on the case or what the CASA Advocate's concerns or recommendations might be. If they want information, they should be directed to the DHS Caseworker due to confidentiality.

8. Contact all therapists for parents and children as needed.

- Please gather the contact information for the therapist that includes the name of facility, phone number, and fax number if known.
- You will need your CASA Order sent to the child's therapist. Let your CASA Coordinator know to whom you would like the CASA Order faxed.
- You will need a signed release by the parent if you are going to talk to their personal therapist.
- Mail, fax, drop off, or e-mail the parent's signed releases to the CASA office and the CASA office will fax the release to the therapist.
- The coordinator will notify you of when the release has been sent and you can then contact the person.
- These individuals will not talk to you until they have the CASA Order or a signed *Release of Information*. You can provide the optional *CASA and You* information sheet if they are unfamiliar with the CASA role. **Resource 7.**
- You DO NOT need to know what is happening in individual therapy; you only need to know **attendance, goals, progress, and concerns.**

CASA expectations include getting periodic updates from providers. Discuss with the therapist your plan to meet with them in subsequent months.



You cannot release information to the therapist. The release is only one way, information moving from them to you as the Advocate. If they have case-related questions, they should be directed to contact the DHS Caseworker.

9. Contact the school/daycare

- Please gather the contact information that includes the name of the school/daycare, phone number, and fax number if known.
- You will provide your CASA Order to the child's school/daycare.
- You will gather information about the child's attendance, academic progress or concerns, IEP needs, and social issues.
- Let your CASA Coordinator know to whom you would like the CASA Order faxed.



The coordinator will notify you of when the order has been sent and you can then contact the school/daycare.



- It is best practice to keep a copy of your court order with you when visiting the school.
- If the child is attending middle school or high school they will probably have more than one teacher. You may want to talk to someone like a homeroom teacher or a key contact person such as a special education teacher, principal/vice-principal, school guidance counselor, or At Risk Coordinator. You can ask the school who would be a good contact person for the child.
- Provide the teacher/school personnel with your contact information, whether that is your personal phone number or the office number.
- As an option for gathering specific information from the school for an upcoming court hearing, you may elect to provide them with the *Teachers Report to the Court*. **Resource 10.**

BEST PRACTICE

Areas to acquire information include:

- Child's behavior at school
- Educational problems or delays
- Child's strengths
- Changes in behavior
- Child's appearance
- Peer relationships
- Grades
- Parental involvement
- Attendance
- Is there a school counselor working with the child?
- When are school conferences or any IEP meetings scheduled?



CASA expectations include getting periodic updates from the school administration, the teachers, school counselor, and/or daycare providers. Discuss with those individuals your plan to meet with them as needed in subsequent months.



As a reminder, you cannot share information with school personnel. If they have a question, you can provide the DHS Caseworker's name and phone number so they can contact DHS directly.

10. Contact the Family Team Meeting Coordinator.

Using the contact information you gathered from the DHS Caseworker, let the FTM Coordinator know of your appointment and to add you to the FTM email list. You will be notified by e-mail when the next Family Team Meeting will take place so you can attend *if the parent allows you to be present*.

It is OK to share information at a Family Team Meeting. In your report you may mention that you attended the Family Team Meeting but you would not comment on anything that was said at the meeting.



Important Considerations for Your Investigation

You should have a copy of the CASA Order with you in case it is needed when you are communicating with professionals.



Transportation of the children or other persons by the CASA Advocate in their personal vehicle, during the course of performing their duties and responsibilities, is not mandatory. However, following the Transportation Policy is required.

CASAs can perform their duties without transporting a child; however, in certain circumstances a CASA may choose to provide transportation for a CASA child or his/her family members if it is case-related. When transporting CASA children, it is extremely important to consider their safety as well as the CASA's own safety. The need for transportation will be assessed by the CASA and CASA Coordinator when developing the CASA's initial action plan for the case.

We prefer that you not transport children or family members. But if you do, please read and understand the CASA Program: Advocate Policy and Procedure Manual and provide all documentation required.



When feasible attend all pre-placement and placement review staffings, FTMs, Transition Planning meetings and IEP meetings regarding the child. If you are unable to attend one of these meetings, inform your Coach or Coordinator as soon as possible so they may attend in your absence.

When emailing parties, if a group e-mail is sent out regarding the case, you cannot use the “Reply All” and make a comment. You can only give full information to the DHS Caseworker and to the GAL/Child's attorney regarding the child. If a group e-mail has information and you think you should add something just respond to DHS. If the e-mail is regarding setting up a time for a



meeting then it is permissible to respond to all because you are not giving out any information regarding the child or family.

Please feel free to contact your CASA Coach or CASA Coordinator by phone or e-mail at any time with questions.

Preparing to Write the CASA Report

Take good notes and Document, Document, Document

During your first few visits there is a lot of information to gather. To ensure you do not miss out on any key information in your report take notes as soon as possible following a visit.

It is possible to take notes during the visit if you've asked permission to do so and explain the reason for the note taking. Prior to attending the visit, consider the potential impact of the perception from doing this and if you are able to multitask without being nose down in paper the whole time. You do not want it to be a barrier to free flow communication.

If you do not have time for complete notes immediately following a visit, consider doing a "brain dump". The information does not have to be perfect, but writing down the information and formalizing it when you have more time is helpful. When formalizing notes at a later time, write them in a report format so that when it comes time to compile the report, you have most of it done.

Focus on the Facts

Always keep your report fact based on what has been reported to you by a parent, child, worker, etc. or what you have directly observed.

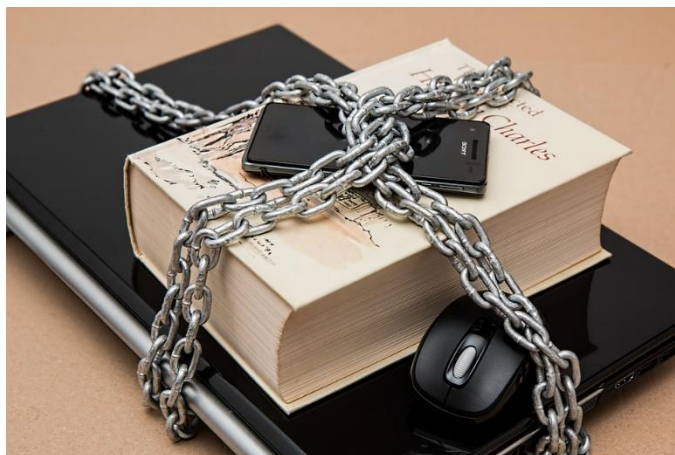
If you are including "reported" information by someone, be sure to site the reference. For example:

- Jane, from Visiting Nurse Services, informed me that she had made the AEA (Area Education Agency) referrals.
- According to Paul (bio dad), Johnny did not have any current medical concerns or needs at this time.



Complete your CASA Monthly Update

The importance of your monthly update cannot be overstated. This is the means ICAB uses to demonstrate we appropriately stay in communication with our Advocates that are out in the field assigned to cases of children adjudicated as Children in Need of Assistance. The monthly update provides the program a means to support your efforts by assessing your learning and advocacy needs, while simultaneously providing key information regarding your case to the program on a consistent basis in case you are unable to continue to fulfill your Oath to the Court. If you are assigned a CASA Coach, they can utilize the information to help guide you in your case contacts and information gathering efforts





Remember

Your CASA report is critical to the role of the CASA program in the Judge's eyes. It summarizes your efforts and your objective findings so that the judge has as much information as possible at each court hearing.

The perception of the CASA Program in others' minds is influenced by how well we administer the program and supervise our Advocates. If we do not provide court reports timely and include full unbiased information, then our role is diminished. This significance is the reason we have clear expectations of your ongoing efforts and stress preparation to write the court report.

You can be the eyes and ears for the judge.

**This is the end of the first section of the
*Investigating and Gathering Information Toolkit.***

Learning Outcomes for Section Two:

- Identify the categories of information needed to be gathered regarding the child(ren).
- Outline 3 methods to develop trust and rapport with a child.
- Identify ongoing types of questions to ask of parties connected to their case to gather the full scope of information for the CASA Report.



50% Complete



Section Two: Investigating and Gathering Complete Information for the CASA Report

Ongoing Monthly Contacts

There are numerous areas to gather information to be able to provide a full objective picture to the judge. Remember that not all of these questions or areas to gather information will occur immediately. Building rapport and trust increases the amount of valuable information available to make recommendations regarding the child's best interests.

Ongoing Monthly Contacts Regarding the Children



There are significant considerations when it comes to gathering information specific to the children for which you are advocating. Each child is unique and each case brings with it unique situations for which we must address. However, there are some common areas which Advocates gather specific information to be shared with the Judge in their CASA Report.

What is the positive description of the child(ren) including special skills, talents, interests, and age?

Current Placement:

- Where is the child(ren) placed?
- What are the changes in the type of placement and the reason for the placement change?
- How does the child feel about the placement? What is the child's understanding about why they are placed out of their home (if applicable)?

- Who lives in the home? Are there pets in the home?
- Does the child have their own room? Or do they share it with how many other siblings?
- Describe the housing and neighborhood: apartment complex, duplex, single family home, a new suburban neighborhood or urban older district.
- Does the child have responsibilities in the home? If so, what are they? Wash dishes, clean own bedroom, do laundry? Does the child do them regularly and who reported the chores were/were not done regularly.
- Is there special concern about others in the home? A pregnant sibling in the home; is there one child who your child is especially close to or has a problem with? Are there a lot of people coming in and out of the home or tremendous activity in the home or is it a very calm quiet surrounding?
- How is the child adjusting? Are there specific behaviors or statements regarding grief from separation from the biological home?
- If the permanency goal is reunification, what is the description of the biological home?



Education: including Pre-school or Early Head Start

- What grade? What school do they attend?
- Do they have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) in place and are other services provided to them at school? What is the date of the last IEP?
- How is the child doing at school academically? What are their specific grades?
- How is the child doing in school socially? Are they involved in extra-curricular activities?
- Does that child want to participant in school activities? If so, what?
- What comments did teachers provide regarding progress, issues/concerns and recommendations?
- What are the child's strengths in education?



- What was the child's attendance?
- How does the child interact with their peers and staff?
- Are there any problems with behaviors? What is the number of suspensions/detentions/behavior reports and the behaviors that resulted in disciplinary actions? How many days missed due to behavior problems?
- What are the specific strengths related to academics and the educational experience?



Social:

- With whom does the child socialize? Friends in the neighborhood? Foster siblings? Children at school or church?
- In what types of activities outside of school does the child engage? Boy Scouts? Church youth group/choir? Sports?
- Does the child state they would like to participate in something? What is that activity?
- Do they have a boyfriend/girlfriend? Best friend? Few friends or many?
- What additional activities could the child participate in that meets the prudent parenting standards? Prom, summer camp, friend's birthday parties?
- Are there any barriers to the child's social experience?
- What are the strengths of the child's social experience?




Mental Health

- Does the child have a mental health diagnosis? If so, what is that?
- Is the child receiving medication management and if so, by whom and what is the medication management protocol?
- Is the child receiving therapy? If so, how often (frequency), with whom and what type (group, individual or family)?
- How often do they actually attend?
- What issues, in general, are being addressed?
- What progress, if any, is being made?
- How much does the child participate in therapy?
- What are the prognosis and/or recommendations by the therapist?
- What is the date of most recent evaluation?
- If not in therapy, has this been recommended by professionals to occur?
- Are there behavioral issues? In what setting?
- Are there any barriers to meeting the mental health needs of the child?
- What are the strengths of the child related to their coping as related to their mental health?



Medical/Dental:

- What is the date of the last appointment, current health status, and developmental issues?
 - Is the child on medication currently? If so, who provides them and follows up on meds? What is medication for? Is the child compliant with medications?
 - What additional issues have been identified by doctor/dentist that may need to be addressed?
 - What services are being provided to deal with any issues?
 - Does the child need additional special examination (eye/ortho/gyno)?
 - Is the family/foster family having difficulty accessing health services due to insurance reasons?
- 
- A photograph showing a close-up of a doctor in blue scrubs using a stethoscope to examine a young child's chest. The child is looking towards the camera with a neutral expression. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.



- Is the caretaker complying with doctor instructions and follow-up appointments?
- Are there any barriers to meeting the medical/dental needs?
- What strengths exist related to the child's physical health?

Visitation:

- Does the child want contact between siblings or other important relatives?
- How often does the child actually see the parent, family members or other siblings, and in what circumstances (length of visit; type-supervised, semi-supervised, or unsupervised and by whom; where is the visit held)?
- How does the child feel about the visits which have occurred? What are these visits like for the child?
- Have you observed the visits? If so, what are the objective observations you made during the visit(s)? Remember, you are like a movie camera. Let the observation speak for itself.
- How does the child get to the visit? Who is responsible for transportation?
- What are the child's interactions with each person during visitation?
- How is the parent's interaction with the child during visits?
- Have parents attended all scheduled visits?
- If visits have been cancelled, what were the reasons for cancellation?
- How long until visits are rescheduled?
- What are the barriers to the child being able to visit with other family members?
- What are the child's strengths demonstrated during family visits?



Additional Services:

- What are the Transition-to-Adulthood issues, independent living skills?
- Have any key services to the child begun (or ended) during this period and are any either pending or being recommended?

Child's Personal Statements:

- Has the child expressed any wishes/statements they would like included in the report on permanency, visits, or their concerns. For example: *the child wants to go home; a bike; to go to summer camp; dye their hair; a driver's license; to visit an incarcerated parent.*
- *Include their quotes to the judge if obtained.*
- A child can include handwritten statements or letters to the court. An optional form *Child's Report to the Court* is available for you to share with the child that can be used as a guide, but it is not required.

Resource 11.



How to be Effective in Gathering Information from Children

When developing a trusting relationship with the child, it is important that you visit the child regularly and keep all appointments. You build credibility in the child's eyes when do what you say you are going to do, when you said you were going to do it.

The purpose of these visits is to gather information about the child's well-being and their needs. If they are old enough to communicate with you they can share their wishes, which you may share with the Court and legal parties. As Advocates you need to be sensitive to how difficult this might be for a child to meet and trust new people under the circumstances.

As an Advocate, one of our tasks is to outline our questions so we can gather the needed information. What we know to be most effective with children are indirect and open-ended questions that allow them to freely narrate and expand on their ideas. Encourage them to ask questions and share whatever they would like about themselves or their family. They enjoy and need a sense of control over what they are saying and will be doing in their time with you.



“Eight Steps to Engaging Children in Conversation”

Steps	Clarification	Suggestions
1. Do Your Homework	1. Empathy for the child is an important first step.	1. Consider “How is the child likely to be feeling?” “How are they likely to react to meeting with the Advocate?”
2. Find a Peaceful Space	2. Find a calm setting where the child can feel safe.	2. Join the child on their level. Is there a trusted adult nearby?
3. Keep it Light	3. Join or initiate an activity so the child has a neutral focus.	3. Board or card games, coloring books, or outdoor activities are a good place to start.
4. Start Small	4. Begin with safe topics/small talk.	4. Allows the Advocate to quickly assess the child’s developmental level for future conversation
5. Know Your Limits	5. You are not a therapist, attorney or forensic interviewer.	5. Advocate’s purpose is to learn about the child and help them understand the CASA role
6. Acknowledge Feelings Explicitly	6. Something you intend to be comforting might shut down future conversation.	6. Rather than “I’m sure everything will be fine” say, “That sounds like a frustrating day at school”
7. Don’t Just Say “No”	7. Consider all requests made by the child.	7. If you have to say “no” explain why and follow up with a suggested alternative.
8. Listen, Listen, Listen	8. Listening to children demonstrates respect and builds self-esteem.	8. Listen more than you talk

Modified from Ben Wilkins Director of Training/Assistant Program Director, Dallas CASA “Eight Steps to Engaging Children in Conversation”

Planning How and What to Ask

Once you have developed a trusting relationship with the child and the child has an understanding of the Advocate’s role, the Advocate can begin to focus on gathering information. Plan in advance the information you want to gather from visiting the child. Your questions should focus on the child’s

best interests and his or her needs and wishes. The optional *Child Interview Form* can be used to organize your information gathered regarding the child. **Resource 12.**

It is imperative that you have an initial understanding of the child's developmental stage as a reference for the kinds of questions to ask or the types of observations you will make during your monthly contacts. **Resource 13.**

Ask open-ended questions such as “What is on your mind?” or “What questions do you have for me?” or “What would you like the judge to know?” “What do you like to do in your free time?” These are examples of open-ended, strength-based questions.

Advocates should avoid interviewing the child in favor of visiting with them. The interactions should be more of a conversation – opportunities to get to know the child.

Using the Nurtured Heart Approach

Establishing a trusting relationship with an assigned child may prove to be more challenging than anticipated. Utilizing a technique taken from the Nurtured Heart Approach to begin a conversation with a child, could help to “break the ice”.

Active and Experiential Recognition: Ask yourself, “What is so great about what I am seeing right now?” when you are struggling to engage a child in conversation. This technique shows you how to appreciate the child for who they are, recognizes the positives and instills values.

1. Describe something positive that the child is doing right now.
2. Attribute a value to the child's action.



“I notice/see that you are (fill in an Emotionally Nutritious Word, such as acting responsibly) because (describe what you are seeing as evidence, such as completing your homework and turning it in on time).” See the “Emotionally Nutritious Words” **Resource 14** for examples.

As a CASA Advocate:

- Prepare questions in advance and have neutral topics in mind.
- Don't rigidly stick to your own agenda. Give the child the freedom to talk of own interests.
- Visit with, not interview the child.
- Meet in a safe, and if possible, neutral setting.
- Be pleasant but avoid determined cheerfulness.
- Try to be at the child's height level for the communication.
- Avoid initiating body contact. Be respectful if the child initiates physical contact.
- Have an age-appropriate explanation of the CASA role.
- Ask open-ended, strength-based questions.
- Don't push talking about something the child does not want to talk about. Change the subject if a subject becomes too distressing.
- Respond with respect for the child's feelings.
- Acknowledge their responses and their feelings.
- Be alert for indirect verbal messages.
- Check out their perception of what's been said or has happened by letting the child tell you about it.
- Ask for elaboration when necessary to make sure you understand their meaning.
- Avoid "Why" questions.
- Be honest but brief and age and developmentally appropriate.
- Use concrete terms as much as possible and explain complicated things by breaking them into understandable pieces.
- Note and use the young child's language for word choices. Be alert for cultural variations in language.
- Observe and note nonverbal communication, especially under stress.
- In addition to information gathered from the child, note the child's affect, mood, abilities, and interactions with others.

Discussing Difficult Topics

Advocates will need to be prepared to discuss difficult, even uncomfortable, topics with older youth when the youth initiates the topic.

Advocates should never bring up topics regarding past trauma the youth has experienced. Only if the youth chooses to discuss this subject should the Advocate engage in this conversation.

Advocates need to be aware at all times when they are beginning to cross the boundary to becoming the youth's counselor/therapist. It is always ok to listen, but giving advice is off limits. Talk with your CASA Coach or Coordinator when concerns arise that might require a referral to a professional. This will help maintain the appropriate role of the CASA Advocate.

Youth involved in the child welfare system often have limited opportunities to make decisions for themselves. CASA Advocates can help older youth develop the skills to make their own choices. Utilizing open-ended questions can help the youth to explore their options. Participate in the *Fostering Futures* in-service training for specific information for working with older youth.

As a CASA Advocate, when a youth talks about a difficult issue:

- Stay Calm.
- Listen.
- Be aware of your body language and facial expression.
- Avoid making judgmental statements.
- Reassure the youth that you are glad they share with you.
- Be honest, but use tact.
- Do not give advice.
- Be supportive.
- Use open-ended questions to help the youth explore their options.
- Do not bring up issues of past trauma.
- Don't pry; let the youth share at their own pace.
- Do not collaborate with others to discipline the youth.
- If the situation warrants immediate intervention, contact program staff and the DHS Caseworker to explore the need for a referral to a professional.

What to do if a child discloses abuse:

Occasionally a child may disclose a new allegation of abuse to the Advocate. It is important to be aware of what to do to assure the child's safety and to make an accurate report of abuse without compromising a potential child abuse or forensic investigation.

It is not the role of the Advocate to determine IF the abuse occurs.

The Advocate should contact program staff and a decision be made together to make a child abuse report via the 800 phone number and then inform the DHS Caseworker. It is important to make this report right away, before the child's memory fades or the child is pressured to recant. If the child's immediate safety is at risk, a call to 9-1-1 may be necessary. After your report is made, DHS or law enforcement will determine if an investigation is warranted.

As a CASA Advocate if a child discloses new abuse allegations to you:

- Listen, remain calm and be neutral.
- Respond empathetically, stating you are sorry the abuse has happened, that you want to ensure they are safe and will need to contact someone that can help, and that they are brave for sharing it with you.
- Get only the information you Need to Know from the child:
- Do not ask details; leave that to the trained investigators.
- Avoid "why" questions which infer blame.
- To avoid asking leading questions; ask open-ended questions.
- Use the child's language, avoid "adult words".
- Do NOT use dolls, stuffed animals or drawings.
- Thank the child for telling you.
- Let them know you will follow through and then DO!
- Your role is to assure the safety of the child – not to determine IF the abuse occurred.
- With program staff assistance, report to the Child Abuse Hotline and the DHS Caseworker as soon as possible:
 - In Iowa the Child Abuse Hotline # is **(800) 362-2178**
 - If you believe the child is in imminent danger dial 9-1-1
- After you have reported, do not ask the child again about the allegations as this may lead to:
 - Re-victimization of the child
 - Gives the child the impression they are not believed
 - Interferes with the investigation

Additional Points When Gathering Information Regarding Children



While gathering information regarding the child(ren), you are putting together the pieces of a puzzle which forms the final picture of what you believe is in the child's best interests regarding safety, permanency and their well-being. It is important for your court report to contain the factual information you have gathered so you can formulate your objective recommendations that are supported in your unbiased report.

Throughout the case you are gathering clues that help you better understand the child and what the best interests are for that particular child at this particular time in this family. There will be times you may have contradictory clues, or pieces of the puzzle that do not seem to fit together correctly. The key is to not prematurely reach a conclusion or allow any one piece of information to influence your thinking before you independently corroborate it through other sources.

This requires you to carefully sift through the information with an awareness of your own biases or personal issues in your own history. It is possible to have a certain reaction to a parent which could prompt you to interpret the child's play in a way that is favorable or not favorable to one parent or the other. You need to question what you see, hear, and experience during the visits with the child. For example, the expression of a child's dislike for one parent might represent:

- 1) an accurate reflection of the child's feeling towards a parent,
- 2) a parent who has not developed a close connection with the child,
- 3) a child who is acting out their feelings based on dislike for discipline they received from the parent,
- 4) a child who is projecting one parent's feelings towards the other parent,
- 5) a child who has been "brain-washed" with negatives about the other parent, OR
- 6) a child who feels abandoned by that parent.

A CASA Advocate will need to weigh a child's repeated expression of a parental preference as the most important factor to consider. The question needs to be understood in the context of the particular family. It is necessary to understand why it is so important for the child to communicate to you, in a variety of ways, their parental preference if they continue to share that information with you.



Before summarizing your conclusions, think about the jigsaw puzzle again. Ask yourself if the pieces really fit or if you might be trying to force certain pieces to fit.

Consider the many possible reasons for the behavior you have observed. Sometimes all the pieces do not fit and you need more information. Our task, as objective Advocates, is to put together a picture that is as accurate as possible, using the resources which are most helpful to us.

Excerpt from article for National CASA on Interviewing Children.



Types of Considerations for Observations of Children

Knowledge about how people communicate is important while gathering information from children. Some children can talk about their situations and their wishes, but other children do not have verbal and developmental skills sufficient to express their needs and wishes. Because the verbal skills of children vary, fact-based observations about a child are a vital part of a CASA Advocate investigation.

Because it is impossible to observe everything a child does, it is important to think about what specific information you may want to know about the child, while trying to keep your mind open to unexpected information.

Reading through the following types of questions to consider prior to and during an observation, can help you remember what to look for and note, as those considerations will help provide valuable information about a child:

1. What is the specific situation in which the child is operating?

What other activities are going on? What are the general expectations of the group at the moment and what is the general atmosphere of the room—calm, noisy, hectic, happy, boisterous, quiet?

2. What is the child's approach to materials and activities? Is the child slow in getting started or does he/she plunge right in? Does the child use materials in the usual way or does he/she use them in different ways, exploring them for the possibilities they offer?

3. How interested is the child in what he/she is doing? Does the child seem intent on what he/she is doing or does the child seem more interested in what others are doing? How long is his/her concentration span? How often does he/she shift activities?

4. How much energy does the child use? Is the child lethargic? Does the child work at a fairly even pace or does he/she work in spurts of activity? Does the child use a great deal of energy in manipulating the materials, in body movements, or in talking?

5. What are the child's body movements like? Does the child's body seem tense or relaxed? Are movements jerky, uncertain, or poorly coordinated?

6. How does the child express themselves? Does the child talk, sing, hum, or use nonsense words while he/she works? Does the child use sentences or single words? Does the child communicate with others using words or gestures?

7. What is the child's affect (visual emotions)? What are the child's facial expressions? Does he/she appear frustrated? Happy? Do expressions correspond to what he/she is saying or doing?

8. How does the child get along with other children if present?

Does the child play alone, with only certain children, or with a variety of children? Is the child willing or unwilling to share toys? Does the child always initiate or always follow along with group ideas?

- 9. What kinds of changes in behavior/mood/emotion are there from the beginning to the end of an activity?** Does the child's mood change during that period? If so, is it frequent? Are behaviors inconsistent depending upon who is interacting with the child?
- 10. What is the child's relationship with you?** How does the child respond to you and others present during the visit? Does the child greet you, respond appropriately to questions, listen to adults, etc.?
- 11. What is the child's relationship with others: parents, caseworker, attorney, foster parents, etc.?**
- 12. How does the child transition from one activity to the next?** Is the child able to calmly stop an activity when necessary or redirected? Does the child always become upset when change occurs?
- 13. How does the child respond to discipline or rules?** How does the child respond when given a directive by the caregiver or other authority? Is the child usually compliant, openly defiant, unresponsive?
- 14. What seems "different" or "troubling" about this child as compared with other children of the same age?** Recognizing that the stages of development have wide ranges, is the child's behavior or development significantly different than others of his/her age?
- 15. Are there issues that you think should be checked out by a professional (vision, hearing, dental health, cognitive development, physical development, psychological development, etc.)?**

Adapted from "Assessing a Child's Welfare," Eunice Snyder, ACSW, and Keetje Ramo, ACSW, School of Social Work, Eastern Washington University, 1984



Ongoing Contacts Regarding the Parents

In addition to the questions asked during the first few visits, an important part of the ongoing contacts is to monitor the status of the case, the goals and the parent's progress, as the initial permanency goal is reunification.

Optional *Parent Interview Form* **Resource 15**

Things to monitor include:

- The condition of the current residence/whereabouts and any changes during each reporting period.
- Ask the parent what their understanding is of what is needed to be done/expectations to be successful in having their children returned back home. What are the possible reasons for non-compliance such as transportation, getting fired for missing work, etc.? Are there any goals they are having trouble completing? What are their barriers/What do they need help with?
- What services are being provided, or is the parent availing himself of, in pursuing the goals of the case plan?
- Review DHS Case Plan recommendations for expectations of:
 - Participation in services: type of service, who provides, attendance, what progress they think they are making, concerns they may have regarding the service?
 - Does the parent have a copy of the CPP or an alternative "contract of expectations", a "refrigerator list" or FTM notes that outline their personal "TO DO" list for the court and DHS?
 - Therapy – Have they been able to attend regularly? What progress do they believe they are making?
 - Substance abuse treatment – Are they attending and do they believe they are making progress? Do they have a sponsor?
 - FSRP Services – Are they finding the FSRP worker helpful? What is the FSRP worker helping them with?



- Visitation – How often do they get to visit the children? How are the visits going?
- Do they have transportation to get to services and, if not, have they informed DHS?
- Has the Court ordered services in addition to the DHS Case Plan? If so, review the court order with the parents.
- Does the parent believe other services are needed but are not being provided at this time?
- What did you observe in terms of the parent's appearance, demeanor and behavior?
- Did the parent convey thoughts or concerns regarding the children, progress with their case plan or future plans that would be of interest to the Court?
- If you spent time reminding the parent what the judge expects of them/ordered, note what the parent's response included.
- Ask the parent if they have something they would like the court to know; note statements from the parent accurately.
- Continue to identify any family support or strengths.
- Listen for any clues that there may be Native American heritage. Inform DHS immediately if new information arises that could impact following ICWA.
- What additional information regarding any of the areas noted in the CPP, connected to the parent, was gathered during the reporting period?
- If drug screens are done, you only need to inquire if they were clean, dirty or missed.
- If medication is prescribed and is connected to a concern stated in the CPP, then obtain general information about what the parent has shared with you about the issue. *(HIPAA regulations require specific releases for this information to be distributed if the source of that information is someone other than the patient.)*

Regarding the Home Environment?

This is needed specifically for the parent who is targeted for reunification or is trying to maintain custody of the child.

- What is the home like that the child will be returning to or is presently living in?
- Who is in the home at the time of your visits? Do people come and go? Who is actually living in the home presently? Have their been background checks completed on the adults living in the home?
- Are your visits announced, unannounced or both?
- Is the home adequate to accommodate the child or children when they return to the home?
- Where will they sleep?
- Is the home safe and stable?



Ongoing Contacts with Other Parties

You will want to acquire statements from others involved with the family on a regular basis. Some of these questions may have been answered during your initial visits, but it can be helpful to acquire pieces of information on an ongoing basis to demonstrate when something has changed for the positive or negative, or to show there has been no change in the status during the reporting period. To help support your ongoing contacts an optional *Monthly Contact Form* is available to ensure you are consistently gathering updated information demonstrating a "big picture" lens to the court. **Resource 16.**

DHS

- What information have they acquired related to the progress made toward meeting the case goals?
- What barriers do they identify toward goals being met and successful reunification?
- What needs to occur so that visitation can be increased, either frequency or length?
- What new services have been offered to the family to address issues?
- What changes impact the concurrent plan for the child(ren)?

- Has any new information come to light regarding the potential of Native American heritage and the need to follow ICWA guidelines?
- CASA Advocates also update DHS regularly on what the CASA has learned from their monthly contacts regarding the children and parents. If this contact is done by email, remember the updates need to be fact-based and objective as they could be forwarded or used as a piece of evidence during a court hearing.

Parent's Attorneys

- Contact can be made to monitor a case issue or expectation if the attorney perceives that their client is experiencing barriers to being successful in meeting the CPP goals or court expectations.

GAL

- Regular contact with the GAL is recommended. They are also looking at the child's best interest and can provide additional information from their contact with the children and parents. The GAL may be a significant supporter of the CASA recommendations, and if they have similar information in advance of court hearings, can effectively advocate for a similar position in court.

Foster Parent/Relative Caretaker

- The caretaker can provide information to the court in the optional *Foster Parent Report to the Court*. **Resource 17**
- Monitoring how the child is doing in the home is essential information.
- How is the child doing in the caretaker's home?
- Does the caretaker have any concerns?
- How are the visits from their perspective?
- How does the child respond before and after visits with a parent?
- Is the child eating well?
- Are there any health concerns?
- Do they get along with other children in the home?
- How is their behavior at home and at school, and outside the home?

Other Family Members, if involved

- If there are siblings, whether they are adjudicated as well or not, how often and where do the siblings have visits together?
- What type and frequency of contact is occurring with other relatives?
- What kind of involvement do other family members have with the children and/or family and are they a possible resource for the parents or a placement option for the child/ren?

Service Providers

- FSRP workers – Attendance, Goals, Progress and Concerns.
 - Due to the DHS contract with providers, they are required to submit monthly reports to the DHS Caseworker. Remind the worker that they can provide those monthly reports to the CASA at the same time they email DHS.
 - You may need to request these reports monthly.
- Therapist – Attendance, Goals, Progress, and Concerns.
- Teachers – Attendance, Progress, Concerns. How are they doing academically and socially? How are they dressed? Are they tired or hungry when they come to school?
- Day Care Providers – How do they get along with other children and how is their attendance? Do they have any concerns?
- If the parents have a Parent Partner you do not need to talk to them because what they talk about with the parent is confidential. We want the parent to feel comfortable talking with the Parent Partner and know that it will not be shared with others.
- Requesting written reports from professional providers to submit with your CASA report, i.e. therapist, school teacher, day care providers, etc. can also corroborate your CASA report facts.



Strengths Identified While Gathering Information

Throughout the investigation and monitoring of the case, the Advocate should constantly be identifying strengths and protective factors for individuals and the family. For example, does the family have friends, relatives, church members, or others who provide the family with needed support? Is the parent making progress in court ordered services? Does the parent have housing, employment, or positive social activities? Use the *Strengths in Families Worksheet* as a guide. **Resource 18**



Do not forget to include any smaller steps of progress the child and family are making toward any goal outlined in the CPP domains related to attending therapy, school, visitations, or maintaining housing and employment. It is important to remember that people are more likely to build upon their strengths, and as a result, more likely to be successful when their strengths are noticed and honored.



A more thorough understanding of how to monitor for protective factors and understanding advocacy efforts at subsequent court hearings will be provided in the *Monitoring a Case* in-service training.

Concerns Identified While Gathering Information

Throughout the case you will be summarizing your thoughts, case actions, and your need of support in the monthly update to your Coach/Coordinator. This monthly update is an ideal place to also include concerns you are identifying while gathering information so your Coordinator or Coach can assist you as necessary in outlining your future action steps, the contacts and questions you might ask, or the specific types of observations to make. Additionally, this helps your Coordinator identify case-specific learning needs and training opportunities.

As you continue to gather information, ask questions, and make observations, it may be determined that your concerns are alleviated or they remain and are included in your report to the court.

Sample concerns you might have regarding the following areas:

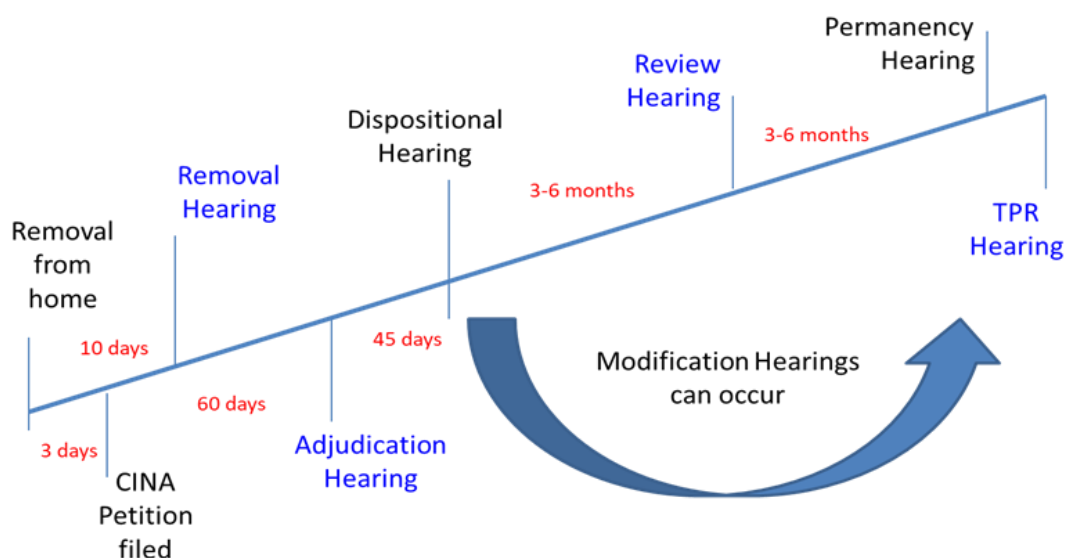
- ✓ Other issues not covered in the CPP or within the court orders that you believe need to be addressed and have not been done thus far,
- ✓ Whether or not the child's overall needs are being met,
- ✓ Identified unmet needs that can be met by the family or with community resources,
- ✓ The safety of the child,
- ✓ The interaction between the child and parents,
- ✓ Interaction between parents.



Writing the CASA Report

As you continue to investigate and gather additional information, you will be working toward writing a report for a particular court hearing. That hearing will have a purpose and function to address specific issues and judicial proceeding needs which are defined by where the case is at on the judicial timeline.

Some of your recommendations for what is in the best interests of the child(ren) will be based on what progress or lack of progress has occurred between hearings. We provide specific training on understanding how to monitor a case, related to the specific court hearings, so your report is effective and supports the Judge's need to make the necessary findings and orders.



Remember



The CASA court report is one of the most essential aspects of your work as an Advocate. It is the tool to effectively communicate the child's perspective and best interest.

You are the eyes and ears of the judge.

This is the end of the Investigation/Gathering Information Toolkit. Report Writing & Monitoring a Case in-service trainings will also be provided.